

An Introduction to the Millennium

Revelation 20:1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.

² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,

³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.

⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison

⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.

⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,

¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.

¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.

¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

(Rev 20:1-15)

Revelation is Easy!

As I was growing up, it was **self-evident that Revelation was the easiest book in the Bible to interpret**. God raptures his church away before a seven-year Tribulation which concludes in the Battle of Armageddon, followed by Jesus returning physically to the earth where he rules the world for a thousand years with people who never die in a rebuilt temple. After this follows a short rebellion that God quickly crushes, the judgment comes, and God ushers in the new heavens and the new earth. Everyone knows these things. What could be so hard to understand about that?

Then I began to learn that things weren't quite so simple. People would ask me, "Are you pre, mid, or post?" What were they talking about? They were asking about the timing of the Rapture. Pre-Trib teaches the Rapture of the church prior to the Great Tribulation, that seven literal year period of hell on earth. Christians are outta-here. After salvation, it's the happiest doctrine in the Bible. Mid-Trib refers to the Rapture taking place halfway through it, exactly 3 ½ years, "a time, times, and half a time," "42 months," or "1260 days." Why? Because Christians are not to experience God's wrath, only man's wrath, but it is only the second half of the Tribulation that is God's wrath. Not quite as happy, but still, not bad. Post-Trib refers to the Rapture taking place at the end of the Tribulation, right before the Millennium. That one doesn't make anyone very giddy. You mean I have to live through all this? OK, so many there were a few disagreements over how to interpret the book.

Then the real awakening came. Years later that I began to realize that some Christians didn't even believe in a Rapture. *How could they even be Christians?* They had a disagreement on the timing of a more fundamental question. Suddenly, pre- and post- referred to something completely different. The heated disagreements and hugely different interpretations of Revelation opened up by this can of worms extended the

distant recesses of all eschatology and prophecy and made me understand that I should probably never try to teach Revelation to anyone. Since that discovery, I have taught it once to a youth group and three times at our church. 😊

If interpreting Revelation is a **giant earthquake**, Revelation 20 is its **epicenter**. The strongest shockwaves can be felt here, and it is from here that all the seismic shaking of all our disagreements in the rest of the chapters emanates. **That seems strange**. Why not the first chapter? Why not the middle chapter? What's so special about Revelation 20 that would make it so important to the interpretation of the book as a whole?

This chapter is the only place in the Revelation that speaks of “**a thousand years**.” Perhaps you have heard the term “**chiliasm**” (aka Premillennialism)? This is the Greek term for “1000.” χίλια ἔτη (*chilia etē*) becomes chiliasm—“1000 years.” The Latin translation is *mille anni*—“1000 years,” hence **millennium** or millennialism. Pre- and post- now refer to *the millennium*! The thing about this is that Christians have disagreed for 2000 years on both the timing (when does it happen) and length (how long will it last) of this “thousand years.” One of the reasons for this has to do with the question of how exactly are we supposed to read

Revelation? **Hermeneutics** play a huge role in our interpretation of this book.

Should we read the book **literally** or **symbolically**, or better, “literalistically” or symbolically? That’s a question that impacts **the length** of the millennium. Should we read the book **linearly** or **cyclically**? That is, do its events move forward in time chronologically from one chapter to the next, or is there recapitulation that sees the same thing talked about from multiple perspectives? That’s a question that deals more with **the timing** issue. Those who tend to read the book chronologically usually turn out to be Pre- or Postmillennialists. Those who read the book more cyclically tend to be Amillennialists. But I don’t want to move quickly through these terms. Today we are going to simply look at this question of the millennium and the different views that are out there, along with how I read the book.

I’ll begin with what we mean by Pre-, Post-, and Amillennial? These terms deal with the timing and length of the millennium—when will the millennium take place and for how long? To this, the church has generated **four views** that can be classified in four pairs of twos, depending on

perspective.¹ These are **Historic Premillennialism**, **Dispensationalism**, **Amillennialism**, and **Postmillennialism**.

Relation of the Return of Christ to the Millennium	
<u>PREMILLENNIAL</u>	<u>POSTMILLENNIAL</u>
Dispensationalism	Amillennialism
Historic Premillennialism	Postmillennialism

Relation of the Return of Christ to a Future Tribulation	
<u>PRE-TRIBULATIONAL</u>	<u>POST-TRIBULATIONAL</u>
Dispensationalism	Historic Premillennialism
	Amillennialism
	Postmillennialism

The Relation of the Church and Israel	
<u>DISPENSATIONAL</u>	<u>Historical</u>
<u>“The Church is Distinct from Israel”</u>	<u>“The Church is the New Israel”²</u>
Dispensationalism	Historic Premillennialism
	Amillennialism
	Postmillennialism

The Relation of a Future Millennium before the Eternal State	
<u>Chiliasm or Millennial</u>	<u>Anti-Chiliasm</u>
Dispensationalism	Amillennialism
Historic Premillennialism	
Postmillennialism	

Since the millennium deals with “last things,” these are four views of *eschatology*—the study of last things. Let’s talk for a moment about “**last things**.” This is very important.

¹ The following comes from the helpful summary in **Sam Waldron**, *The End Times Made Simple* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 2003), 16-17.

² As a chart, this is fine, but it is much too simplistic. The view is actually that the visible church is distinct from visible, national Israel; but the invisible church made up of the elect who are saved by faith in Christ is the same group as the invisible Israel, that is the saints of the OT who are saved by faith in Christ. The only difference is one of historical relationship to the cross of Jesus. The OT invisible Israel were prior to the cross; the NT invisible church is after the cross.

Most people think of “last things” as being in our own future. Last things and “end times” become synonymous. This is a presupposition, and one that is not necessarily rooted in the Bible. Eschatology is literally, “The study of last [*eschatos*],” not the “end” (which would be something like *telos*). A good example of this is **Hebrews 1:2**, “In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son.” In this case, the last days began nearly 2,000 years ago. We see the same thing in Peter’s first sermon at Pentecost (**Acts 2:17**). For him, the last days began with the ministry of Jesus Christ. This is a vital hermeneutical point that effects what we are looking at today. Keep this in mind as we move now to the different views of the millennium.

Perhaps the simplest of the four perspectives to begin this discussion is Pre- vs. Postmill. Historic Premillennialists argue that theirs is the oldest view, clearly being held by **Justin Martyr** (110-165 AD) and **Irenaeus** (130-202 AD). But keep in mind that even Justin himself said, “Many belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, [who] think otherwise” (*Dialogue* 80).

Premillennialism basically says that the Second Coming will take place before the millennium and Christ will reign on earth, bodily, for 1,000 years. A sub-category of this is Dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is also premillennial,

but it is also by far the newest view in the church. On the other hand, postmillennialism basically teaches that the Second Coming of Christ will occur *after* the millennium and any bodily rule of Christ will be for an eternity. A sub-category of this is Amillennialism. With respect to Christ's reign and the millennium, Pre- and Post- are the only two millennial categories there are.³

Before I go any farther, it is necessary to make perhaps my **most important point of application**. Like Justin said, none of these systems makes a person a non-Christian, a pagan, or an unbeliever. All of them are within the pale of orthodox Evangelical eschatology. To put this into a Confessional perspective, **our Confession** says virtually nothing about the timing or length of the Millennium. It just wasn't an issue, even though they knew full well of disagreements over pre- and postmillennialism. This is **not a test of orthodoxy**, and as much as I think some of the views might get a lot of things wrong (as do they in reverse) and that this has some very important implications for theology and how we interpret the world around us, one is not a "heretic" simply for holding to any of these views.

³ **Dionysius of Alexandria** (200-265) would be an example (albeit after Justin) of someone who disagreed with premillennialism. He did not believe there would be a temporal reign of Christ upon the earth (Frag 1.1). After him, Origen and Augustine were mainly responsible for the popularity of non-premillennialism in the early church.

This must be **our baseline**. Our speech towards one another and their differing views must be seasoned with kindness, fairness, and gentleness. Something a lot of Christians do not take seriously enough is that *how* we do theology is every bit as important as *that* we do theology. **Love your neighbor** and **love your enemy** do not cease as commandments just because someone disagrees with you on eschatology. Unfortunately, this hasn't always been taken seriously in the past, and it has been a pox on the church that sometimes still sometimes oozes puss, and at the very least has created scarring that will never go away.

That said, there is much more to dig into today. Though present world events (which is ironic, see below) and simply preaching through this book have **caused me to once again question which view is correct**, the view I've held for 20+ years remains one of those sub-views stated above (though this has been challenging to maintain). I've changed since adolescence from one sub view to the other. To me, the amillennial reading of Revelation is the one that (still) makes the most sense. But this is **a misunderstood view**, especially because of its name. It is a sub-category and that also needs explaining. It has also been deeply attacked, some even calling it antisemitic.

What I hope to do here is explain these things along with why I read Revelation 20 and the rest of the book through this lens and why this matters. My current plan is to do a kind of [mini-series on Revelation 20](#). After this introduction, I'll turn specifically to the binding of Satan ([Rev 20:1-3](#)). Then I'll look at Christ's kingdom and those ruling with him for 1000 years ([4-6](#)). After this, I'll deal with the Gog-Magog conflict ([7-10](#)). Finally, I plan as of now to look at the Last Judgment and Hell ([11-15](#)). There are a lot of themes that we have already seen, but it is ch. 20 that finally allows us to bring them all together.

Amillennialism—What's in a Name?

Let's begin with [terminology](#). [Chiliasm](#) as a term has been around since at least Augustine, who used it in *The City of God* (20.7). He and Calvin and others were not fond of the view. [Postmillennial](#) as a term to describe their view came into favor in the 19th century, with perhaps 1851 being the first example. But eventually, people began to understand that there was a subset among postmillennialists that was quite different. [Amillennial](#) became that go-to term. It has been used for less than 100 years, with Louis Berkhof in the

early 1930s being among the first to use it.⁴ It literally means “**without millennium.**” (The “a” negates the noun, like atheism—“without God,” or amoral—“without morality”). The term makes it sound like Amillennialists do not believe in a millennium. But of course they do. To say there is no millennium is to deny Scripture.

Amillennialism does not deny the existence of the millennium. Rather, it denies that Jesus will reign *on earth, physically*, during a *future* millennium. Again, this does not mean Amillennialists deny that Jesus will reign on earth. Of course, he will. He will reign forever in eternity in a new heavens and earth. But he *already is reigning on the earth*—right now! The closest place to see this to our epicenter is **Rev 20:4**. “They [the souls of those who had been beheaded] came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” Amillennialists believe that both the reign of these saints and the reign of Christ in the 1000 years *is a present reality*, not a future one.

There are *other terms* that I like better than *amillennialism*. The first is “*realized millennialism*,” which seems to have first been suggested by **Jay Adams**. It is “realized” because this view believes that the millennium is

⁴ On this history see **R. Scott Clark**, “A Brief Note on the History of Amillennialism,” *The Heidelbergblog* (April 20, 2021), <https://heidelberg.net/2021/04/a-brief-note-on-the-history-of-amillennialism/>.

a current reality. That is, we are in the millennium right now. In fact, we have been for nearly 2,000 years. “**Now millennialism**” might therefore be a good term for it, but it isn’t a very pretty term. “**Spiritual millennialism**” (one encyclopedia calls Augustine’s view “Allegorical Millennialism” which I do not like) kind of works, so long as people understand that the spiritual world is very much a *literal* world, it just isn’t the physical world ; also, there is a physical dimension to it in that the church now, as she are made up of physical beings.

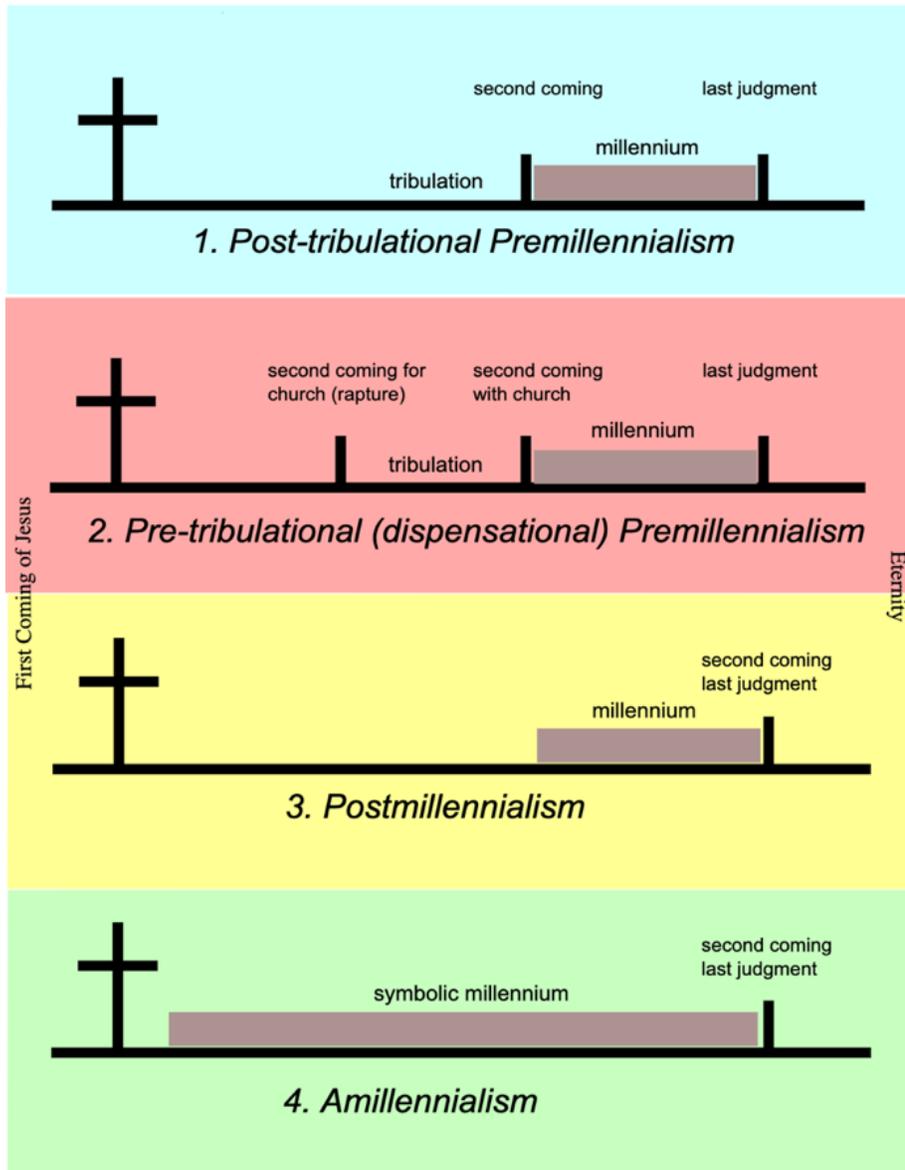
“**Present Millennialism**” fits better with Pre- and Post-. I went looking for prefixes that might work. To distinguish three stages—pre, post, and one in the middle, sometimes the word “peri” is used. Peri means “during.” **Perimillennialism** has a nice ring to it, but it isn’t as clear as it could be. Perhaps the funniest I saw was when someone asked, “**We were discussing something like pre-boss era, post-boss era.** What word describes the era where the boss is still there?” And the reply came, “**The ‘boss era.’**” Another said, “**Exactly. Why would there be a prefix to indicate nothing?**” And someone else said, “**I have the same issue but with ‘pre-January’ and ‘post-January.’**” What would be in the middle? January! With that kind of thinking, it makes sense to simply called it **Millennialism**, because we are in it!

Amillennialism is Postmillennial?

Having looked at the name, I want to turn to this idea that [amillennialism is a subset of postmillennialism](#). How could this be? If the millennium is a present reality, how could it also postmillennial? The answer is its view of the relation of the Second Coming of Christ to the Millennium. Amillennialists agree with postmillennialists that [Jesus will return after the Millennium](#)—hence, postmillennialism. But after this agreement, it is quickly apparent that amillennialism is quite different in the way it views eschatology than postmillennialism. Let's talk about this in more detail.

Probably the best way to understand this is by looking at [charts](#) that show us the difference in the views. We can make these charts as simple or complex as we want. Here's a [simple chart](#) for an overview:

Comparison of Christian millennial teachings



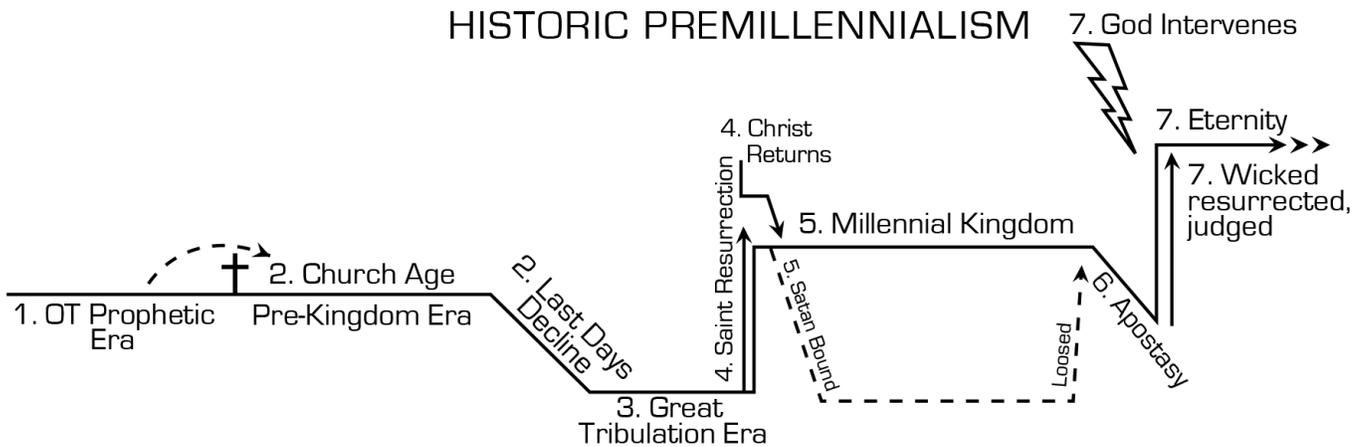
Notice that **all** begin at the cross and all end as the **Last Judgment**.

Amillennialism (bottom) has the millennium running throughout the span between the two Comings, while all other views see the millennium coming only at the end. The differences between Pre- and Post- is that Premillennialism

sees a Great Tribulation occurring prior to the Millennium, while Post- sees no such event and Pre- sees the Second Coming prior to the Millennium while Post- (and A-) see it after. But this is quite simplistic, and so it can also be helpful to look at a little more detail. I'll start with premillennialism.⁵

⁵ These charts were originally found on postmillennialism.com, but I found them at <https://disciplesforlife.org/2014/11/29/millennial-charts-of-the-four-major-views/>. Ken Gentry had an explanation that I have downloaded, but can no longer find.

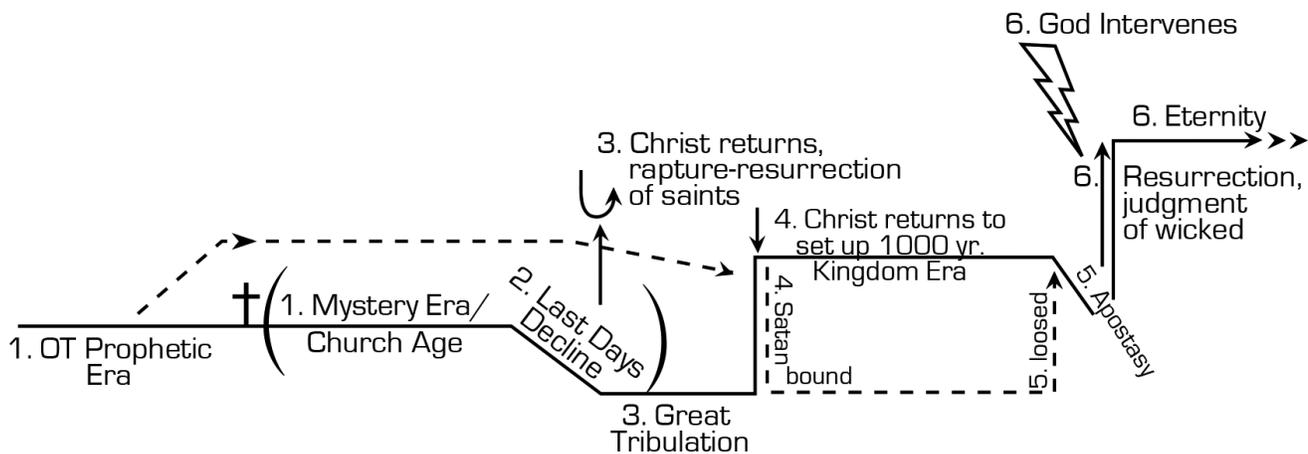
HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM



Historic Premillennialists like Irenaeus believe that after the cross, Jesus ushered in the church age, the **initial phase of Christ's kingdom**. During this long period of time, Jesus wins many converts, but the world itself does not get better. In this, it sees a basically **pessimistic** view of the transformation of secular culture. Over time, the church also becomes corrupted, though many reforms can and have happened. At some point, things get terribly bad all around, but not before Palestine is restored to the Jews (**Isa 35:1; 55:13; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13; Ps 67:6**) and the temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem (**Ezek 40-48**). Eventually this corruption turns into **the Great Tribulation** which lasts an indefinite period of time and only ends when Christ returns and the saints are resurrected. At this moment, Jesus returns bodily to the earth to reign with the resurrected saints on earth for **a thousand years** (**Rev 20:6**). This is the Second Coming.

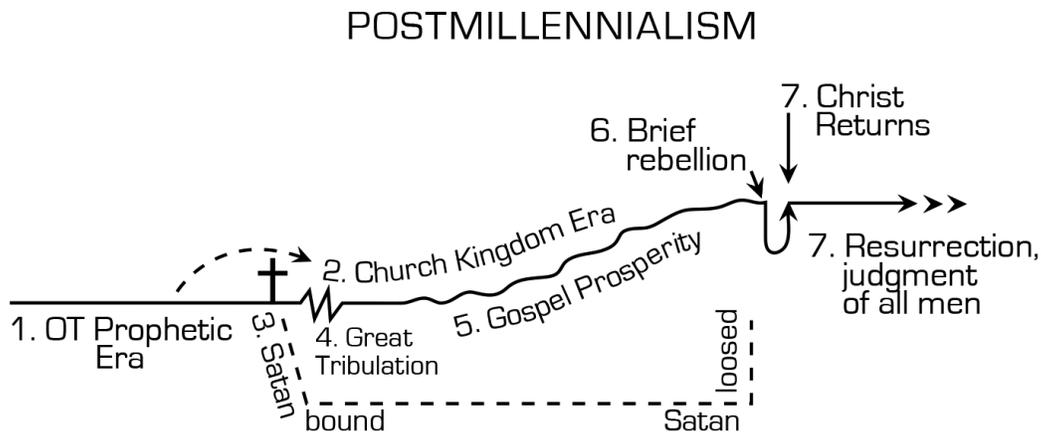
Satan is bound during this time (Rev 20:2) and cannot to any harm to anyone at all. The animal kingdom is at peace (Isa 11:6-9) and non-resurrected people live for 1,000 years (Isa 65:22; Zech 8:4). The Aaronic priesthood and temple sacrifices are reinstated (Ezek 44:15-31). After the thousand years are over, Satan is released, a great apostasy takes place, but God intervenes with fiery judgment to rescue the church. Only then comes the Last Judgment followed by the eternal sate (new heavens and the new earth).

DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM



Dispensationalism is a modification of this view which sees several important differences. I'll mention only two here. First, Christians are Raptured out of the earth prior to the Great Tribulation (or halfway through it). This Great Tribulation is the 70th Week of Daniel's prophecy, which was postponed after the 69th week which took place while he was here the first time. Second, as the Seventieth Week,

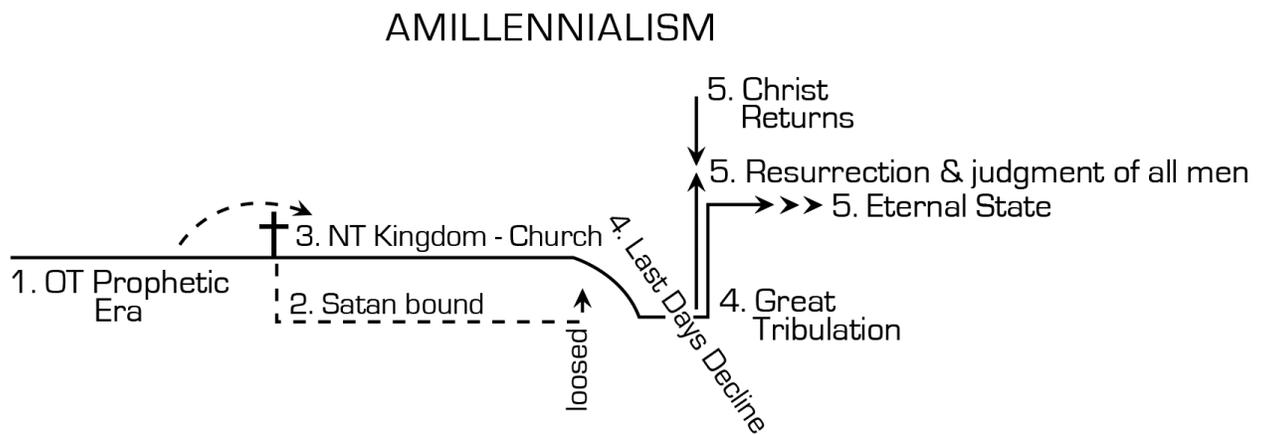
God deals once more, as he did with all the other 69 weeks, with his people—the Jews. So, Dispensationalism sees a sharp distinction between the church and Israel. What we are in between the First Coming and the Rapture is a “great parenthesis,” the “church-age,” where God is not dealing with the Jews as his people. That will change.



Postmillennialism agrees that there will be a future millennium before the eternal state, but it is quite different in most other respects. Jesus founds his kingdom during his First Coming. It is not first and foremost a political kingdom, but a spiritual and redemptive kingdom.⁶ In this, it also agrees with the other views. However, Postmillennialism has a very *positive view of secular history* because it believes that the church will become so influential that the vast majority of people will eventually be saved, by God’s grace alone. They see this is what God has promised.

⁶ Postmillennial Reconstructionists would probably nuance this quite a bit.

As this happens, civilization naturally gets better and better. Eventually, the earth simply finds itself in the millennium, basically unnoticed. It can happen because **Satan was bound during Christ's First Coming**. However, the Lord will loose the devil near the end, where a brief rebellion will occur, only to be stopped by the Second Coming of Christ and the ushering in of the Final Judgment and the eternal state.



Finally, **Amillennialism** likewise sees **Satan bound in Jesus' first coming**. But it sees the **millennium also being instigated at that very same moment** in time. There is no waiting around for the world to be converted and culture to be transformed for the millennium to come. It is here now. Culture can be transformed, but this never results in a Golden Age, rather, that is for the eternal state. At some point, the devil is loosed and there is a great rebellion. This is followed by the Second Coming, the Final Judgment, and the eternal state.

Amillennialism is Antisemitic?

Earlier, I said that some have charged Amillennialists as being **antisemitic**. This is a rather serious charge, and one that needs to be addressed. First, where does the charge come from? It comes almost exclusively **from Dispensationalists** who see a very sharp distinction between Jesus' church and the nation of Israel. The charge is that Amillennialists (and often Postmillennialists) believe that the church **"replaces"** Israel. Hence, they often call amillennialism **"replacement theology."** This in turn opens the door to antisemitism. Fred Butler represents this view when he writes,

The shameful legacy of Antisemitism in church history [is] due in part to replacement theology. One of the shadows to darken Christ's Church has been the severe mistreatment of the Jewish people for the last 1800 years in the name of Christianity, and a lot of the persecution was fueled by the idea the Church had replaced Israel as God's people.⁷

I can't generalize why some people are antisemitic. I can denounce it and most certainly do in all its forms. No one is

⁷ Fred Butler, "MacArthur's Millennial Manifesto – Rejoinder #1," *Hip and Thigh* (Aug 22, 2008), <https://hipandthigh.wordpress.com/2008/08/>.

lesser or eviler than someone else because of their race. I can say that this **strawman** fails badly to understand non-Dispensationalism. No one believes that the visible church replaces the physical nation of Israel any more than one believes that the visible church replaces the nation of Nepal or Norway just because some people from those nations become Christians.

In fact, I've never read or met a single person who believes "**replacement theology**" as it is said we believe. As Riddlebarger said when he was responding to MacArthur pulling this same thing several years back, "**It was hard to recognize my own position as Dr. MacArthur made his case.**"⁸ What Amillennialists teach is the classic Reformed distinction of **the visible and invisible church**.

The **visible church** consists of both the saved elect and falsely professing outward Christians and together (in this age) make up the local assemblies we see throughout the world. No one in the world believes your local Baptist church down the street replaces national Israel. The **invisible church**, however, consists of the **elect**—throughout the

⁸ **Kim Riddlebarger**, "Riddlebarger Responds to MacArthur on Amillennialism and Calvinism: John MacArthur on Calvinism, Dispensationalism, Israel and Hermeneutics—a Few Comments," *ThirdMill* (April 2007), https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.asp/link/kim_riddlebarger%5Ekim_riddlebarger.BugMacAttaack.html/at/Riddlebarger%20Responds%20to%20MacArthur%20on%20%20Amillennialism%20and%20Calvinism.

ages—saved by grace through faith in Christ. To put names to it, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, John, Paul, Jude, Justin, Irenaeus, Augustine, Luther, Horton, Heiser, whoever ... are all the invisible church—assuming they are all saved. This is literally why Jesus chose the word *ekklesia* (“church”), because it comes from the LXX translation of *the assembly of Israel* in the OT. How can the church replace something that it always has been? I’ll leave it to better minds than mine to figure that one out. But if there is no replacing of national Israel, then how could this make someone antisemitic? You have to look elsewhere for answers to that despicable problem.

The reason I bring this up is again to help us each reconsider—*how we do theology is as important as that we do theology*. We have to be fair with other positions. We must be longsuffering with them, doing our best to understand them and not to create strawmen, simply because we don’t like that view. This should be true even with the worst heresies, though at the end of the day the church does need to stand for the essential doctrines *Once-For-All-Delivered* (*Jude 3*) to the saints according to “*the traditions*” of the Apostles (*2Thess 2:15*). How much more then for debatable issues within the pale of orthodoxy? Misleading labels like “replacement theology” are bad enough. To insinuate that

someone could be antisemitic because of their eschatology is a serious charge. And if it is not true, it brings shame upon the body of Christ.

We Are in the Millennium Now?

I want to turn now to the question, *how could anyone possibly believe that we are in the millennium now?* I will give you **five answers** to this question, after we first look at what it **assumes**. The question assumes that it is absurd to think we are in the millennium now. Why would someone assume this?

I grew up being taught that the millennium was this lengthy but still temporary **Golden Age prior to the eternal state** where no one sins, no one dies, hostility between man and animals is removed, there is a rebuilt physical temple in Jerusalem with animal sacrifices in it, and Jesus Christ has returned bodily to reign in state called Israel for literal 1000-year period of time. Obviously, if this is the case, then it is self-evident that we are not in the millennium now. It's been nearly 2,000 years, double 1000. Yes, there is a nation called Israel, but there is no rebuilt temple. Most animals hate us. People die. And People still sin. That's anything but a Golden Age.

I'll respond to this in five ways. **First**, I believe that passages that are used to predict things like friendly animals, crazy long life, and sinlessness are **misinterpreted** as

belonging to the Millennial age when in fact they are **predictions of the eternal state**. I'm not sure when or how this started to become a problem, but perhaps it has something to do with the fact that many have **de-physicalized the eternal state** so that they understand not a new heavens and new earth, but an eternity of bodiless, earthless, spiritual existence in a netherworld flying around on clouds and things.

Other passages such as those used to predict a rebuilt temple or renewed animal sacrifices or the physical reign of Jesus for 1000 years have been taken **literalistically** when they are actually **meant to be taken spiritually**. For example, Ezekiel's third temple, why can't this be a symbolic picture of the NT temple, which Jesus says is church? Do we not offer our bodies as living sacrifices, now? Are we not "the Israel of God," "the true circumcision," "true Jews" as the Apostles call us? I will not defend this today; I'm simply explaining that I interpret such passages quite differently.

Second, this leads to a truth we have seen throughout our interpretation of Revelation. We've seen countless instances, hundreds of them really, since beginning our study, that Revelation—at the very least—*can* be read

symbolically rather than literalistically.⁹ Obviously, people disagree that it should be, but I think I've given plenty of reason over these months to demonstrate that this is not only a possible way to read it, but the correct way.

If this is true about so many other parts of the book, including perhaps every single number we've seen either represented in lists or stated explicitly—especially the numbers 42 months, 1,260 days, and 3 ½ days, why should “a thousand years” be any different?¹⁰ In fact, as I said earlier, “a thousand years” is a phrase found only here in Revelation. However, it is found in three other places in Scripture. The Psalmist says, “For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night” (Ps 90:4). Peter quotes this verse, curiously, when talking about the Day of the LORD, which we might call the Second Coming. Solomon asks, “Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?” (Ecc 6:6). Now I ask you, are any of these meant to be taken as talking only about exactly 365,000 days, not one more and not one less? Is this not simply a very large number that is used to convey something

⁹ I keep using this word, because the word “literally” does not cut the mustard. If you are reading a metaphor, then the “literal” way to read it IS metaphorically. If you do not read a metaphor metaphorically, then you are not reading it literally, but literalistically.

¹⁰ We will see in a later sermon that these numbers actually parallel “1000” in the structure of Revelation.

beyond our realm of personal experience? This is precisely why Christians have disagreed with the actual length of the millennium. Yes, some take it woodenly as a literal 1000 years, but most Christians have taken it symbolically for a very long period of time, which is how Amillennialists could say we have been in the millennium for nearly 2,000 years.

Not only this, why should the reign of Christ be any different? This leads me to my **third** point, which is **the immediate context of those reigning with Christ** for a thousand years. We've already seen this verse today. "I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (**Rev 20:4**). I think it is easy to see why some people interpret this as talking about a physical bodily resurrection, and therefore a physical bodily reigning with Christ. We'll look at why I don't think that is the case in another sermon. But here I just want you to notice something. It doesn't use the word body, but "**soul**." The "souls" came to life. This is like John saying earlier that he saw the "souls" of the martyred saints under the altar crying out... (**Rev 6:9-10**). How does a soul cry out unless it is alive? This is the reason many have seen here

more **spiritual language** and in fact they see this as the heavenly counterpart (that is the spiritual rule of Jesus Christ now) to the binding of Satan. Christ is reigning with the saints now ... from heaven.

This takes me to my **fourth** point. **The binding of Satan** occurs in **Rev 20:1-3**. The “**souls**” reigning with Christ passage is **20:4-6**. Amillennialists see these as occurring not consecutively, but **concurrently—simultaneously**. Structurally, they are parallel:

Rev 20:1-3 and 4-6 Parallels	
Angel coming down from heaven	Thrones in heaven
Dragon seized for 1000 years	Saints reigning with Christ for 1000 years
Released after 1000 years	The rest of the dead come to life after 1000 years

As Satan is bound, so the saints reign with Christ. This is a heavenly, spiritual reign rather than a physical, earthly reign. Satan’s binding is not in physical chains of iron, but is *a spiritual binding*. How does one even go about physical binding a spiritual being in the first place? So also theirs is a spiritual reign in heavenly places, and the gates of hell cannot withstand it.

I’ve said several times now that Amillennialists see the binding of Satan as a present reality. This seems just as foolish to many people as saying that we are in the millennium. But let’s look and see **what the text actually**

says about this binding. Let's ask, "Does it say that he is bound in every possible sense, so that people will never be tempted, never sin, never die, and so on?" It certainly doesn't say that here. But it does say something very specific. Satan is bound and thrown into the pit "so that he might not deceive the nations any longer" (20:3). Deceiving the nations *is a spiritual activity*. In fact, that's the only thing it says the binding does to him here. Anything more must be read in from other passages.

I want to ask two questions here. First, is Satan still deceiving the nations or is he no longer deceiving the nations? This is the most basic, important, fundamental question I think we can ask about the entire subject of the millennium. Your answer determines pretty much where you will end up coming down on the millennial question, at least if you want to be consistent. If you say he is still deceiving the nations, then you will likely be a premillennialist of some kind. If you say he is not, then you will likely be a postmillennialist of some kind.

All I will say today is that if you look at the Deuteronomy 32 worldview, where the nations were given over to the sons of God, left in total spiritual darkness, where all they could do was grope around hoping they might feel their way towards God and then compare this

with everything in the book of Acts, beginning with Pentecost and all the nations hearing the Gospel, the missionary endeavors of the Gentiles being reached, the sermons like Paul at Mars Hill literally referencing Deuteronomy 32:7-8, and so on, I think you will conclude that he is no longer deceiving the nations. In fact, if you are a Gentile and a Christian right now, but are not going to Synagogue and becoming a physical Jew through physical circumcision, then I think you pretty much are exhibit A. That's all we need as far as Rev 20 is concerned, for the binding of Satan to be a present reality. That's it.

Second, do you remember what Jesus said about the strongman? “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God *has come upon you*. Or how can someone enter *the strong man's house* and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house” (Matt 12:28-29). Notice the word “bind.” Who is the “strong man” here? Jesus said this because the Pharisees had just said he was casting out demons by Beelzebul—Satan. In other words, Jesus is telling them, no, I am not a tool of Satan. Rather, I have bound Satan and that's why I'm able to do these miracles. Jesus is saying that Satan has been bound and people are being freed! The context is *the Gentiles* (vs. 18). That's exactly why

Amillennialists believe that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 is a present reality rather than a future one.

I want you to see this through [the parallels in John's Gospel](#). There are three of them. These are linguistic markers like we have been seeing throughout our study. The inverse parallel to this is found in John 3. One is, “[John \[the Baptist\] had not yet been cast into prison](#)” ([John 3:24](#)). This matches with “[He cast him \[Satan\] into the abyss ... and Satan will be released from his prison](#)” ([Rev 20:3-4, 7](#)). The second one is, “[And as Moses lifted up the serpent, so the son of man must be lifted up](#)” ([John 3:14](#)). This matches with, “[And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old ... and threw him into the abyss](#)” ([Rev 20:2](#)). If John is the mirror of Revelation, then the parallels suggest that it is during Jesus' earthly ministry, concluding at his death, that Satan is bound.

The direct parallel to Revelation 20 is found at the end of John 19. “[Jesus, knowing that all things were now finished ... said, 'It is finished!' ... and they took the body of Jesus and bound it ... and placed it in a tomb](#)” ([John 19:28, 30, 40, 42](#)). This parallels, “[He laid hold of the dragon ... and bound him, and shut him in the abyss .. that he should deceive the nations no more until the thousand years were finished](#)” ([Rev 20:2-3](#)). Again, the convergence of the

language takes us to [the First Coming](#) and the earthly ministry of Jesus—especially to his death.

The [fifth](#) answer to the question of how anyone could believe this has to do with [the structures](#) that ch. 20 are linked to. Ch 20 links together with various parts of Revelation and this strongly leads me to the conclusion that this is not a linear, chronological unfolding of history, but one that comes back again and again on itself. I know that is strange for people at first, because we are not used to reading literature like this, but after 19 chapters of this, I think we can all appreciate it at this point.

We've seen many times how Revelation folds in on itself at [Rev 12:9-10](#) such that everything on either side is parallel. Those parallels have to mean *something* as far as how we interpret the book. (Here's one example:)

- A. Epistolary introduction, 1:1–8
- B. Promises to overcomers, 2–3
- C. [Heavenly throne room, 4–5](#)
- D. **Four horsemen, 6:1–8**
- ...
- D'. **Rider on white horse, 19:11–16**
- C'. [Martyrs enthroned, 20:4–6](#)
- B'. Bridal city, including gifts to overcomers, 21:1–22:5
- A'. Epistolary conclusion, 22:6–21¹¹

¹¹ [Leithart, 2:275.](#)

Another shows how chs. 17-22 also form a structure, which Beale rightly concludes, “Further suggest that 20:1ff. does not chronologically follow 19:11-21.”¹²

- A judgment of the harlot (17:1–19:6)
- B the divine Judge (19:11–16)
 - C judgment of the beast and the false prophet (19:17–21; cf. Ezekiel 39)
 - D Satan imprisoned for 1,000 years (20:1–3)**
 - D’ the saints reign/judge for 1,000 years (20:4–6)**
 - C’ the judgment of Gog and Magog (20:7–10; cf. Ezekiel 38–39)
- B’ the divine Judge (20:11–15)
- A’ vindication of the bride (21:1–22:5; cf. 19:7–9).

Importantly, chs. 19-20 form a structure:

- A. Beast, false prophet, cast into lake of fire (19:19-21)
- B. “Come down from heaven” (20:1)
- C. Satan bound 1000 years (2-3)
- D. “They lived and reigned with Christ 1000 years” (4)
- E. “Until the thousand years were finished” (5)**
- D’. “... and shall reign with him a thousand years” (6)
- C’. When 1000 years are finished, Satan shall be loosed (7-8)
- B’. Fire “came down ... out of heaven” (9)
- A’. Devil cast into lake of fire where Beast and false prophet are (10)¹³

As do Chs. 12-20,

- a. Dragon introduced, 12
- b. Beasts introduced, 13
- c. Harlot introduced, 17
- c’. Harlot destroyed, 17–19:10
- b’. Beasts into lake of fire, 19:11–21
- a’. Dragon into lake of fire, 20¹⁴

¹² G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 983.

¹³ Isaac Brown, “Revelation 19:19-20:10,” *Biblical Chiasm Exchange* (Dec 21, 2016), <https://www.chiasmusxchange.com/2016/12/21/revelation-1919-2010/>.

¹⁴ Leithart, 2:167. Also William H. Shae, “The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20,” *AUSS* 23.1 (Spring 1985): 54. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1704&context=auss>.

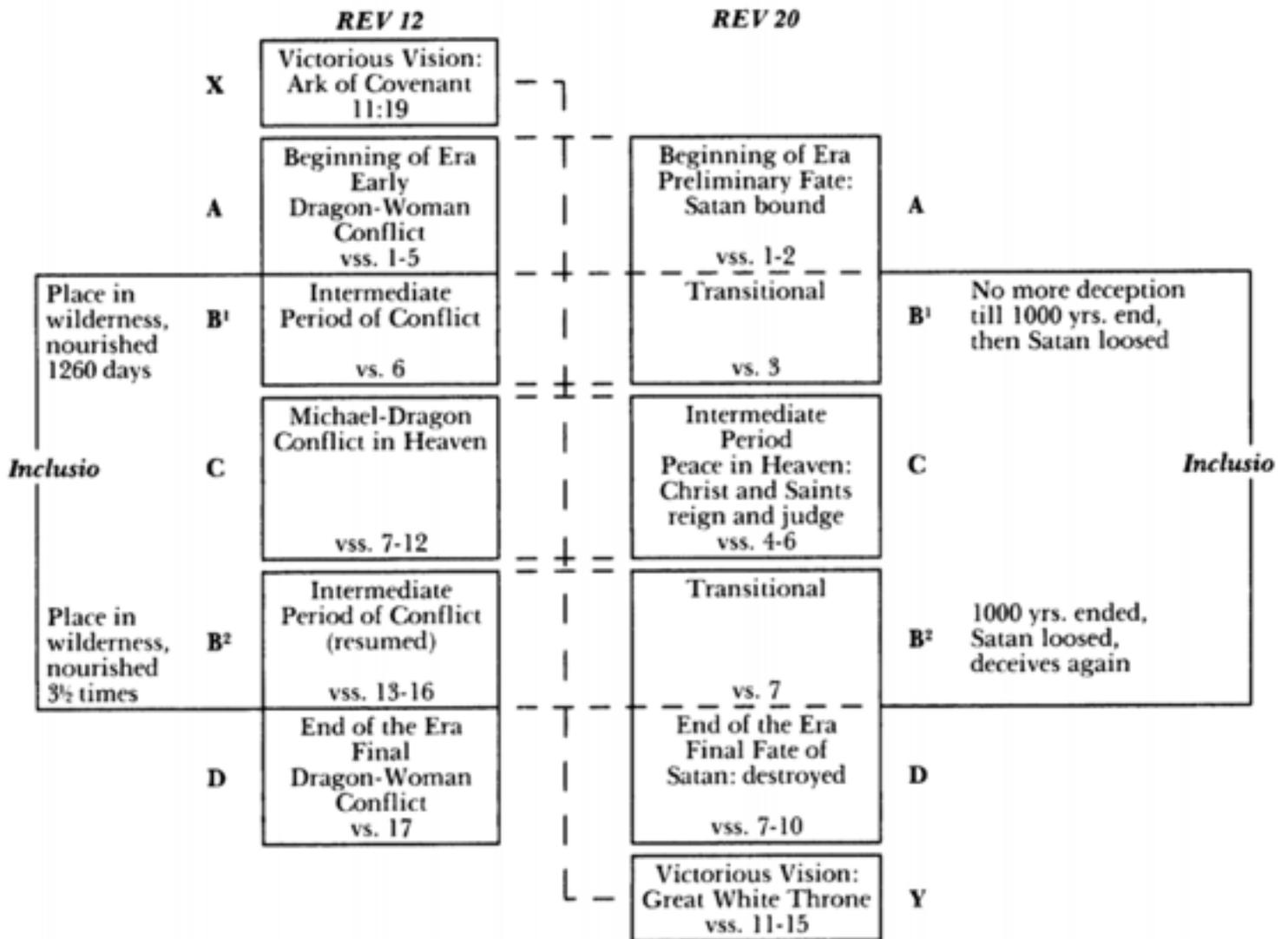
Not only this, but chs. 12 and 20 are virtually parallel in theme and characters and places and function and structure.¹⁵

Revelation 12 and 20 Parallels		
	Rev 12	Rev 20
Heavenly Vision	"A Great sign appeared in heaven" (1)	"I saw an angel coming down from heaven" (1)
A Heavenly Conflict	"Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon" (7)	"The angel ... seized the dragon" (1-2)
Dragon Identified	"The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (9)	"The dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan" (2)
Dragon Thrown Down/ Loses Specific Role	"The great dragon was thrown down" (9)	"And threw him into the abyss" (3)
Results in Kingdom	"Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom ... have come" (10)	"Then I saw the thrones ... and [they] reigned (4)
Victory of Saints	"They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (11)	"beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God ... They came to life and reigned with Christ (4)
Endurance unto Death	"They loved not their lives even unto death" (11)	"beheaded for the testimony of Jesus..." (4)
Final War Against Saints	"the dragon ... went off to make war on the rest of her offspring" (17)	The dragon loosed "to gather them for battle ... surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city" (9)
War Thwarted	"But the earth came to the help ... and opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth" (16)	"but fire came down from heaven and consumed them" (9) ¹⁶

¹⁵ The diagram comes from Shae,

¹⁶ This is an English version of a Greek chart I found online. See also Beale, *Revelation*, 992 for a slightly different chart.

DIAGRAM 1
COMPARATIVE STRUCTURES—REVELATION 12 AND 20



Simply put, this means that if Revelation 12 is not about some future millennium, then neither is Revelation 20, because they are talking about the same thing. Conversely, if Revelation 12 is about the First Coming of Christ followed by the church age, so also is Revelation 20. I think the literary chiastic parallels with John 12 and 19 conclusively demonstrate this?

John 12, 19, Revelation 12, 20

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. (Jn 12:31)	"The great dragon was thrown down" (Rev 12:9)
"He seized the dragon ... and bound him ... And threw him into the pit/abyss" (Rev 20:2-3)	They took the body of Jesus and bound it ... they laid Jesus [in the tomb] (John 19:40, 42)

When read linearly and consecutively, it appears that Revelation 20 and the binding of Satan takes place *after* this gruesome supper where the birds feast on the flesh of men. This is why so many interpret a great battle prior to the binding of Satan and the millennium. Since this supper, apparently, hasn't taken place (Preterists disagree), then the millennium has to still be future. It is very important to really bring home how the chiastic structures that attach to ch. 20 demonstrate that the binding of Satan does *not* follow chronologically with ch. 19. So as we wrap up this brief study of millennial eschatology, I want to show it in yet another way.

As we have been reading Revelation, we have said that it is written in a series of **seven cycles**. Each cycle takes us from the beginning to the end and then the new cycle starts over. It is helpful to look at how several of the other cycles of the book parallel the end of ch. 19:

Rev 20:7-10	Rev 19:19-21	Rev 16:16-21	Rev 14:19-20, 10-11
<p>⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison</p> <p>⁸ and will come out to deceive <u>the nations</u> that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to <u>gather</u> them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.</p> <p>⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,</p> <p>¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be <u>tormented</u> day and night forever and ever.</p>	<p>¹⁹ And I saw the beast and the <u>kings of the earth</u> with their armies <u>gathered</u> to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.</p> <p>²⁰ And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that <u>burns with sulfur</u>.</p> <p>²¹ And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.</p>	<p>¹⁶ And they <u>assembled</u> them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.</p> <p>¹⁷ The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"</p> <p>¹⁸ And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake.</p> <p>¹⁹ The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the <u>fury of his wrath</u>.</p> <p>²⁰ And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found.</p> <p>²¹ And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail.</p>	<p>¹⁹ So the angel swung his sickle across <u>the earth</u> and <u>gathered</u> the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.</p> <p>²⁰ And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.</p> <p>. . . he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.</p> <p>¹¹ And the smoke of their <u>torment goes up forever</u> and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."</p>

Rev 14 (the fourth cycle) ends with the earth being “gathered” for a grape harvest which is “thrown” into the winepress of God’s wrath. This is followed by the smoke of

their torment going up forever and ever. **Ch. 16** (the fifth cycle) ends with the peoples “assembling” together at Armageddon, the angel yelling out from the throne, “It is done,” Babylon the great being made to drink the wine of the fury of God’s wrath, and every island and mountain being removed. **Ch. 19** (the sixth cycle) ends with the kings of the earth “gathering” together to make war against the Warrior who treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God. This is followed by the beast and false prophet being thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. **Ch. 20** (the seventh cycle followed by joy) ends with the nations “gathering” for battle against the church, but the devil is now taken and thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur with the beast and false prophet to be tormented forever. This is followed by the great Judgment of God. We could add to this how **ch. 11** (the third cycle) ends with the nations raging at the wrath of God and the time for the dead to be judged and the rewarding of the saints; how **ch 6** (the second cycle followed by joy) ends with all the inhabitants of the earth begging for the mountains and rocks to fall on them because the great day of God’s wrath has come; and how **chs. 2-3** (the first cycle) end in seven different warnings to the churches to overcome, lest they suffer like everyone else.

To me, this sure looks like Revelation is returning again and again to the same final ending. Not many different identical endings that take place at seven totally different times in history (though those are typed throughout history), but **one glorious ending talked about progressively and cyclically**. If so, then Revelation 20 begins a new cycle and takes us back to the first advent of Jesus, not the Second. So that's how I answer how anyone could possibly be believe in Amillennialism. Basically, the text drives me to it.

Who Cares?

I'll close with a few more thoughts on why these matter. **What possible difference does any of this make?** The answer is, surprisingly **a lot**. If God has told us about the future, then Christians need to figure out as best they can what he is saying. The problem is, it is has been nearly 2,000 years since his last inspired prophecy. A lot has happened between then and now.

When people look at the world around them, they naturally want to know where they stand in relation to prophecy. Unfortunately, **too many people look to the world around them and interpret prophecy according to the newspapers**, often forcing the Scripture to fit into a headline rather than looking to the Bible and seeing what it says on its

own terms and coming to an opinion only then. That's why I said it is ironic that these present days have actually caused me to wonder if my eschatology is right. That's fine, so long as you are always **Bible-centered**, rather than headline driven. **Newspaper eschatology** may get more people into your church, but it is much more honest and lasting to have the Scripture alone be your guide. I'm not saying that's easy, but what happens when your newspaper headline fades away, but your prophecy still hasn't come true? Christians for 2,000 years have had to continually answer that question.

What about the millennium itself? Well, if you are told that **the millennium is going to be this time of absolute sinless perfection** where no one dies and Jesus is here bodily reigning from a physical temple in Jerusalem, then you are going to look forward to things a lot differently than if you are told that the millennium is when Jesus reigns over the earth spiritually, still directs all the courses of history, but does it from heaven. If you hear that Satan is bound in every possible sense during this time that will look a lot different than if he is only bound in a very limited sense—i.e. to no longer deceive the nations. Some of these views are simply incompatible and because of it, it makes the opposite view difficult to understand let alone take seriously—unless you work through the differences and why someone would

come to what you think is such a ridiculous conclusion that no serious person could ever believe. Hence, I return to the charity idea again.

But beyond that, I want to conclude with how in one way, none of this matters at all. Ironic, after a whole sermon on it. That's because, believe it or not, all four eschatological views have a very similar way of looking at the very end. **There is coming a time of great distress upon the world, apostacy like we've never seen before.** Some may have one of these before the millennium, but all of us have this after the millennium and immediately prior to the Eternal State. All agree that this time will not last long and God will, as he has been doing since Noah, rescue his church, even if many individuals must die as witnesses and martyrs in the meantime. This point is seen very easily at the end of Revelation (frankly, all seven cycles) in the Final Judgment where sin is vanquished and Christ rules forever over a new heavens and new earth. My prayer is that beginning today and in the coming weeks, we will all think much on the reign of Jesus Christ—especially his present reign as King of kings. He has never and he will never lose this title or this war. If the world catches the truth of this Gospel message, of his victory and their freedom in Christ, would it not radically change all things?

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